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A DISSERTATION *on a* PASSAGE *in the* SIXTH ILIAD *of*
HOMER. *By the Rev.* EDWARD LEDWICH, *L. L. B.*
M. R. I. A. and F. S. A. of London and Scotland.

BELLEROPHON, rejecting the amorous designs of Anteia, wife of Prætus king of Argos, immediately became the object of her most furious resentment: she insisted on his death, but Prætus, respecting the laws of hospitality, declined perpetrating the deed, committing the execution of it to Jobates, king of Lycia, to whom Prætus sent Bellerophon with letters expressive of his wishes. Read October 15, 1791.

* Περμπε δὲ μιν Δυκηνδὲ, πορὲν ὄργε σήματα λυγρὰ
Γραψᾶς ἐν πίνακι πτυκτῶ, θυμοφόρα πολλὰ.

FROM these lines, from the opinion of Greek Scholiasts and some expressions in † Josephus, it has been asserted, that the art of writing was unknown, not only at the time of the Trojan war but in the age of Homer. A learned ‡ compatriot has laboured

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these

* Homer, Iliad 6. † Contra-Asion, lib. 1. ‡ Wood on Homer, p. 213—214.

these points, and in doing so has added one instance to many others of erroneous ingenuity and misapplied erudition. I hope to make it evident, that Josephus, Mr. Wood, and others, are mistaken, and that the preceding citation, so far from supporting their hypothesis, is positive proof of the contrary. This will oblige me to take a wider range than I originally designed, and introduce some remarks on Greek Palæography.

JOSEPHUS, who on this occasion is much relied on, is an unsafe guide ; because the professed object of his work is, to depreciate the antiquities of other nations to aggrandize his own. Though eagerly pursuing this point, he is yet candid enough to own, that it was a matter much * inquired into and disputed, whether letters were in use at the Trojan war. Did critical and antiquarian inquiries then supply materials and arguments sufficient to decide this question in the negative, there can be no doubt but he would have embraced that side. The opinion he delivers is, that the † present use of letters was unknown at that epoch to the Greeks. A dark expression, the meaning of which seems to be, that there were alphabetic elements in Greece in the Trojan times, though not applied to the recording events. The ‡ early Fathers of the Church, who deserve as much credit as Josephus, and other § writers quoted by Fabricius, speak of authors antecedent to Homer, and whose ages approach very near that of the destruction of Troy.

BUT

* Πολλή γίνεται ἀπορία τῇ καὶ ζητήσει. Joseph. Sup.

† Νυν εἶναι τῶν γραμμάτων χρῆσιν ἰκανῶς αἰγροῖεν. Joseph. Sup.

‡ Euseb. Præp. Evang. l. 10.

§ Fabric. Biblioth. Græc. tom. 1. initio.

BUT long before it became a subject of critical or grammatical investigation, Diodorus Seculus * tells us the Pelasgians had alphabetic elements which preceded the Cadmean. Eustathius † says, the Pelasgians preserved letters at the deluge of Deucaleon. What I have here translated *letters* in the original are *στοιχεῖα*, *elements*. These were the ‡ articulations of the human voice, of which letters were the signs, the types or schemes. Eustathius therefore intimates, that these Pelasgic were the original elementary Greek characters, which is true in fact.

THE Iliad and Odyssey offer numerous proofs of the commercial intercourse between the early Greeks, Egyptians and Phœnicians; and Diodorus Siculus and Eusebius agree in ascribing the superior attainments of Orpheus, Musæus, Dædalus and the other lettered Greeks to their travels into the East. Can we suppose these men, who at every hazard explored foreign climes in search of wisdom, could be insensible to the use and advantages of letters? The Greeks were too lively and ingenious not instantly to have adopted the art and practice of writing. Diodorus Siculus seems therefore more correct than Herodotus in giving the use of letters to the Pelasgians, and I am of opinion with him, that Cadmus § first changed the Phœnician letters to the Greek enunciation, affixing to each a name and peculiar character. Herodotus

* Lib. 3 et 5.

† Μὲτα τὸν κατακλυσμὸν σωσαὶ τὰ στοιχεῖα τοῖς Ἕλλησιν, φησὶ. In Iliad 2. Diod. Sic. Sup. Tzetz. Chil. 5—10—12.

‡ Γράμμα στοιχεῖον διαφέρει· στοιχεῖον μὲν γὰρ ἐστὶν αὐτὴ ἡ ἐκφώνησις καὶ ὁ φθογγὸς· ἢ τὸ γραμματικὸν σημεῖον, ἢ τὸ τυπὸς, σχῆμα. Ammon. de differ. Vocab.

§ Πρῶτος εἰς τὴν Ἑλληνικὴν μεταθέναι διαλεκτὸν. Diod. Sic. lib. 3.

tus says, that Cadmus, with the other arts and sciences, brought letters into Greece, where before they were unknown: that these were such as the * Phœnicians used; but in process of time, with the † found they altered the rhythm of their letters, and lastly the Ionians changed the form of a few.

It has always appeared to me unaccountable how Cadmus came to possess the exclusive honour of introducing an alphabet into Greece, when it is well known the other ‡ leaders of expeditions from the East could have done the same as well as the petty prince of Bœotia. Therefore no sufficient reason can be assigned for rejecting what has been advanced respecting the Pelasgians and their use of letters; and let it be remarked, that Pelasgus, Inachus, Æolus, Lelex and Cecrops, were the chiefs of oriental colonies an hundred years before Cadmus. If the fact then be, as is here presumed, and which seems extremely probable, that the Pelasgians had letters, which Cadmus happily improved, Diodorous Siculus and Herodotus are easily reconciled. For the latter informs us the Phœnicians (and Cadmus was one) themselves changed the φωνη and ρυθμος of their characters. The first was their vocality or sound: Thus for *Aleph*, *Beth*, *Gimel*, they said *Alpha*, *Beta*, *Gama*. They also innovated the rhythm of these eastern elements, that is, they § inverted their form, and altered their

* Τοιοι και απαντι; χρωνται. Herodot. lib. 5.

† Αλλα τη φωνη μεταβλονται το ρυθμον των γραμμάτων. Herod. Sup.

‡ Newton's Chron. p. 13.

§ Itidem literarum modum figuram & scriptionis seriem novarunt. Wesseling. ad Herodot. Sup. Salmas, ad templ. Herod. Attic p. 58—92.

their number and arrangement. This was changing the Phœnician letters to the Greek enunciation, and giving to each a name and peculiar character, as Diodorus Siculus expresses it. Such seems to have been the formation of the first Greek alphabet, free from the learned and tedious disquisitions of Scaliger, Salmasius and Montfaucon.

SURVIVING coins, inscriptions and literary memorials, authenticate this detail. Pure Phœnician letters are seen on the * coins of Ægina, Bœotia and Sicily. It is true, † Le Clerc doubts their existence; but this is putting scepticism in the balance against the credit of respectable men and scholars. Baron Spanheim lived five years after Le Clerc published his remarks, and yet took no notice of his objections, though very material. Fortunately the matter does not depend on this single proof. Plutarch ‡ records singular Barbaric characters, resembling the Egyptian, on the tomb of Alcmena in Bœotia, long preceding the Trojan war. The similitude of these elements to the Egyptian is well conceived, for many of the first settlers in Greece were from Egypt, particularly Cecrops, who being § earlier than Cadmus might have communicated a knowledge of his alphabet to the Greeks.

THIS may be called the Pelasgic epoch of letters; the Cadmean presents us with a mixture of old Phœnician and new Greek letters,

* Spanheim de præf. & usu Numism. Bernard. Orb. erudit. Literat. & alios.

† Biblioth. Choise. Tom. xi. p. 50.

‡ Ἰδιὸς τις ὁ τύπος βαρβαρικοῦ τῶν χαρακτῆρων ἐμφανιστὸς Αἰγυπτίοις. De Gen. Socrat.

§ Spagn. de ideis literar. p. 64. Rom. 1788.

ters, and the Boustrophedon manner of writing *These* appear in the inscriptions found at Eugubium and Perugia in Italy, at Sigeum in Asia Minor, on coins and on tripods in the temple of Apollo at Thebes, mentioned by Herodotus. From the Ionians the alphabet received its last improvements. This brief history of the Greek alphabet was necessary for the more clearly understanding the passage referred to in Homer.

As few languages have experienced * greater changes in its matter and form than the Greek, so the alterations in its letters have been not less remarkable. The old eastern alphabet, on the formation of a new and more convenient one by Cadmus, soon went into disuse, and as palæography was not studied became utterly unknown. This appears plainly from the doubtful manner in which both Herodotus and Plutarch speak of ancient inscriptions. From the † last-named author we learn, that whenever literary remains occurred, it was usual to apply to the Egyptian priests for their explanation, because they had books filled with various sorts of ‡ characters. Now these characters, to be usefully applicable to ancient inscriptions, must have been § obsolete letters, and such were the Roman Notes, as described by Cicero
and

* Nulla autem fuit lingua quæ plures pertulerit mutationes ac μεταπτώσεις, non solum in verborum flexionibus per varios dialectos, sed etiam in ipsis verbis. Salmaf. de Hellen. p. 403.

† Plutarch. supra citat.

‡ Βέλων των παλαιων παντοδαποι; χαρακτηρας. Plut. Sup. And Clem. Alex. Strom. l. 5.

§ In robore insculptas prisicarum literarum Notas. Cic. de Div. l. ii. c. 41. Nactus puerilem iconculam ejus æneam veterem ferreis ac fere exolefcentibus literis inscriptam. Suet. in Oct. c. 7. This subject is fully discussed in the Antiquities of Ireland, p. 90. Edit. Dubl. 1790, by the author of this Dissertation.

and Suetonius. From their length and uncouth shape these antiquated letters appeared more like marks than alphabetic elements, and hence the Greeks named them *σηματα* and *σημαα*; and for the same reason the Romans, * *Notæ*, and these were the *σηματα* of Homer, and the *φοινικια σηματα Καδμυ* of Sextus Empiricus. It is very † uncertain when Homer lived, but let it be when it may, Greek manners and the Greek language were advanced in their progress to refinement; he, therefore, with strict propriety and correct attention to the ideas of his age, calls these obsolete letters not *γραμματα* but *σηματα*. Nor could Prætus have used any other than the latter; for Sisyphus, grandfather of Bellerophon, was coeval with Cadmus, the former beginning his reign at Argos forty-five years after the latter founded Thebes, so that the historical fact and the reasoning agree perfectly together.

I HAVE ‡ elsewhere shewn, that as soon as the power of letters was known among rude people, immediately occult qualities were ascribed to them by those who were ignorant of the art of writing, and of this I have alleged some instances. The Egyptians had their epistolographic, hieratic and hieroglyphic letters; the Idœi Dactyli, who were § Phœnicians, invented the magic Ephesian characters long after the introduction of the new Greek alphabet: the Romans supposed some divine and occult quality to be in let-

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ters,

* Nota alias significat signum, ut in pecoribus, tabulis, literis, singulæ literæ aut binæ.
Fest. Quælibet signa seu scriptalia elementa. Marcellin.

† Euseb. præp. Evang. lib. 10.

‡ Antiquities of Ireland, sup. p. 91.

§ Newton, sup. p. 147.

ters, as appears from Cicero and Plautus, and of this kind were the Runes among the northerns, all deducible from an eastern origin. The ancients also used these Notes and *σηματα* and *σημεια* for * secrecy and expedition. I do not think Prætus's letters were either stenographic, magical or steganographic, because his epistle was folded up and secured, but was written in old obsolete elements.

THAT the art of writing was unknown to the father of Epic poetry is affirmed by Mr. Wood and others, but his

Γραψας εν πινακι πτυκτω

supplies a double proof of the contrary. The active verb *γραφω* clearly refers to the operation of engraving or tracing letters on wood, wax or other substance, and the folded tablet evinces no novel acquaintance with literary and epistolary correspondence. If the *Batrachomyomachia* be Homer's, he tells us he writ in a triangular tablet on his knees.

Ην νεονεν δελτοιςίν εμοις επι γυναις θηκα.

The Greek language, which in his writings is in an highly improved state, must have † required many years and the successive efforts of ingenious men to bring it to his standard. Nor can any
one

* *Δια σημειων.* Cic. Epist. ad Att. l. 13. ep. 32. *Σημεια εν μικροις.* Plutarch in Caton. *Πρωτος υποσημειωσαμηνος.* Laert. in Xenoph. Spanheim. sup. p. 123.

† *Lingua Græca est lingua quæ fuit longo studio & labore fabricata ab ingeniosis hominibus, quæ apud ipsos solum viguit, non vero apud ignarum vulgus & indocile.* Spagn. sup. p. 192.

one conceive that poems of such † copiousness, correctness, and abounding in such numberless beauties and ornaments, started at once into existence, without a long previous cultivation of the poetic art by predecessors. When Achilles is placed by his father Peleus under the care of Phoenix, it was

Διδασκεμένα ταδε πάντα

Μυθῶν τε ρητῆρ εἶμεναι, πρῆκτῆρα τε ἐργῶν,

that he might learn the arts of eloquence and civil wisdom, or to speak as well as act. The works of Homer, perhaps, do not contain a passage more decidedly in favour of the cultivation of letters and the attention paid to the education of a popular chief in these remote ages.

‡ Ipsa res satis docet, tam elaboratum carmen nullo modo esse potuisse, nisi jam satis multis poetarum studiis id effectum fuisset. Heyne. apud. Comm. Nov. Gotting. v. 8. p. 36.